

**Saint Paul Planning Commission
City Hall Conference Center
15 Kellogg Boulevard West**

Minutes February 4, 2011

A meeting of the Planning Commission of the City of Saint Paul was held Friday, February 4, 2011, at 8:30 a.m. in the Conference Center of City Hall.

Commissioners Present: Mmes. Halverson, Merrigan, Perrus, Porter, Reveal, Thao, Wang, Wencil, Young; and Messrs. Commers, Connolly, Fernandez, Gelgelu, Kramer, Nelson, Ochs, Oliver, Schertler, Spaulding, and Ward.

Commissioners Absent: Mr. *Wickiser

*Excused

Also Present: Donna Drummond, Planning Director; Allen Lovejoy, Department of Public Works, Craig Blakely, and Sonja Butler, Department of Planning and Economic Development staff.

I. Approval of minutes January 21, 2011.

MOTION: *Commissioner Kramer moved approval of the minutes of January 21, 2011. Commissioner Thao seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously on a voice vote.*

II. Chair's Announcements

Chair Commers announced that this Planning Commission has a large number of members and it is one of the largest planning commissions in the country. This is a great strength because it gives commissioners the ability to engage in standing committees in an ongoing way. Another advantage of having so many commissioners is that we are able to have discussions at the Planning Commission level on issues that they might not have if there were only 3, 4 or 5 commissioners, which is a lot more common around the state and country. He encouraged the commissioners to feel free to raise questions and make comments at this level as well as the committee level.

III. Planning Director's Announcements

Donna Drummond reported on some recent news items related to Central Corridor. On January 26, 2011 a federal judge who was hearing a civil rights complaint about the Central Corridor project and, issued a ruling. The complaint was that there was not an adequate analysis of the impact on businesses and the traditional African American Rondo community in the environmental impact statement that had been done for the project. The judge declined to stop the project on that basis, but did order the Metropolitan Council to do some additional analysis on the impact on businesses.

Also yesterday the (FTA) Federal Transit Administration announced that it was forwarding the Central Corridor project to Congress for a 60 –day courtesy review. When that is concluded the FTA expects to sign the full funding grant agreement, which will commit the federal government to paying for 50% of the cost of the project.

IV. Zoning Committee

STAFF SITE PLAN REVIEW – List of current applications. *(Tom Beach, 651/266-9086)*

None.

NEW BUSINESS

#10-921-993 Greater Frogtown CDC – Re-establishment of nonconforming use as a 4-unit building. 941 Thomas Avenue between Milton and Chatsworth. *(Luis Pereira, 651/266-6591)*

Commissioner Kramer reported that the Zoning Committee laid this case over to the February 24, 2011 meeting.

Commissioner Kramer announced the items on the agenda for the next Zoning Committee meeting on Thursday, February 10, 2011.

V. Communications Committee

2010 Planning Commission Annual Report.

Commissioner Thao had copies of the 2010 Annual Report in draft form distributed to the commissioners.

Donna Drummond, Planning Director, said that the final version will be sent out via email list and to those who subscribe to receive Planning Commission agendas and minutes electronically. The report will also be posted on the web page and a limited number of hard copies will be made for distribution.

VI. Central Corridor Update: Parking and Construction – Informational presentation by Craig Blakely, PED, and Allen Lovejoy, Department of Public Works. *(Craig Blakely, 651/266-6697, and Allen Lovejoy, 651/266-6226)*

Craig Blakely, PED staff, gave an update on the City's effort to mitigate the loss of parking in Central Corridor. They knew from preliminary design that 50% of the on-street parking would be lost due to mandated design features like stations, two-lanes of traffic in each direction, and left turn lanes. A community process decided that they wanted un-signalized pedestrian crossings between the station areas, and in the spring of 2008 it became clear that another 35% of the parking would be lost.

In the fall of 2008 City and the Metropolitan Council staff formed the Parking Solutions Team, to see how to mitigate the loss of 85% of the parking on University Avenue. It focused first on the loss of commercial parking on University, but quickly realized that it needed to look at all

parking stakeholders – customers, employees, and residents – and at the entire system for managing parking on the street in order to increase utilization of off street parking. The April, 2009 report *Mitigating the Loss of Parking in the Central Corridor* identified site-specific and corridor-wide problems and recommended site-specific and corridor-wide solutions. To help prioritize limited resources, it identified 11 critical areas, where the loss of on-street parking was more of a problem. It and other parking management reports are available on the Planning Division's "Current Activities" and "Central Corridor" web pages.

To address the site-specific problems, the Parking Solutions Team hosted design workshops at each of the 11 Critical Areas in the summer of 2009, where business and property owners met with designers and traffic engineers to identify parking needs and opportunities and recommend potential designs that could address them. These were released in the October, 2009 *Parking Solutions Report*.

To address the corridor-wide problems, the Parking Solutions Team recommended creating the *Neighborhood Commercial Parking Program* to help finance improvements to off-street parking. This program was established in the summer of 2009 with \$2 million in funding. In 2010, 50 business and property owners applied, and 24 projects were chosen through a competitive process for funding.

Most of these projects are small, common-sense improvements to off-street parking lots, but a few are larger and more comprehensive, like the project at the northwest block on Snelling and University. There the City is hoping to rent a 15-year easement on off-street parking lots from private owners, redevelop it in a comprehensive way, and establish a Parking Improvement District to assess the operating costs on the benefitting property owners.

To address the corridor-wide parking management problems, the City convened a Parking Policy Staff Team, which released its report *Central Corridor Parking Policy Recommendations* in November of 2010. The City Council then asked the Planning Commission to facilitate a community review of the recommendations. These include: using new license plate recognition technology to enforce parking time limits more effectively, managing parking on the side streets one block north and south of University for customers, creating permit parking districts on the east and west streets two block north and south of University Avenue to discourage park-and-riders, and involving and educating all stakeholders about the changes that are coming when construction starts this spring and long term when light rail begins to operate.

To improve commercial access through the alleys, and to upgrade the residential/commercial interface, the City has approved \$350,000.00 in CIB funding to repave some of the alleys in the Central Corridor, and \$100,000 in other funding to demonstrate techniques for buffering residential properties from greater commercial use of the alleys.

Allen Lovejoy, Public Works staff talked about the construction schedule. But first he wanted to comment on the parking issue, saying that when they found out how much parking was going to be eliminated they expected that the Central Corridor Project Office (CCPO) would be a partner in dealing with the loss of on-street parking. And after almost a year of going back and forth the Metropolitan Council and the CCPO declined to participate: this is public parking on a public street; it's within the municipality's purview to eliminate parking for health and safety and other reasons. Therefore it is not a mitigable activity as part of the project funding. Although the CCPO did begin to understand the extent to which this was going to impact businesses but they

had no funds to deal with it. Mr. Lovejoy thanked and commended Christina Morrison and Craig Blakely for the work that they have done. The program that has been done so far and the program that they will be working on over the next 3 or 4 years, will be a major assistance to people along the corridor. But this will not solve all the problems caused by a loss of parking. And with the construction starting up in March, more and more complaints will be heard about elimination of on-street parking. City staff will continue to work with businesses as construction moves forward to best manage the parking that is available

Mr. Lovejoy stated that although he will discuss the construction schedule, he cannot be very specific until the CCPO releases its plans in the next few days.

A lot of construction work has already been done in downtown Saint Paul, which started in the fall of 2009 along Fourth Street. The advanced utility work on Fourth Street, including Xcel Energy, District Energy and some other utility companies is now completed, and the final pavement is mostly complete. Such advanced utility work on Cedar has been underway since last Fall and that work will continue through 2011 into 2012. The biggest construction piece, beginning in March, 2011 will entail "civil work" from Hamline west to the city line. Civil work includes reconstruction of the sidewalks, the street, landscaping and the track bed.

In 2011 from Mid March to sometime in November University Avenue from Hamline west to the city line will be under construction and should be completed by the end of 2011. In addition, along Fourth Street the LRT Guideway will be installed. When the Spring work begins on Fourth Street, traffic will be limited to one-way westbound, and will remain so, as the street will be limited to only one lane of traffic when LRT is complete. Beginning in March, Cedar will be closed to through traffic until the construction is complete in 2012. However there will be access to the parking ramps and loading docks. The Operation and Maintenance Facility (OMF) will be in the converted Diamond Products southern building in Lowertown at the end of Fourth Street. It will be a place where the cars will be stored and light maintenance will take place. The heavy maintenance will be done in the Minneapolis shops. Finally, Robert Street from 12th to University Avenue will be completed in the 2011-2012 timeframe.

In 2012, University Avenue from Hamline to the Capitol Area will be built. Also the civil work will be completed and the Guideway built for Cedar in downtown. Beginning at the end of 2011 and running through 2013 will be the completion of the Guideway. The Guideway has a couple of different components, including the tracks, the stations, and the overhead electrical system. Beginning as soon as the civil work is done along the line, it will take 2 ½ to 3 years to complete.

Once the civil work is completed on University Avenue there will be two traffic lanes in each direction, with limited on-street parking, and left turn lanes at signalized intersections. In 2012 and 2013 there will be limited lane closures to stage materials and equipment for construction of the track area. At this time it is unclear as to the frequency and duration of such closures.

In 2014, when the construction is complete, the system must be tested. This will take many months, during which people will see the trains running but the system will not be open for service. This testing of the system is essential to ensure safety. Staff has been discussing approaches to community outreach as construction is about to start. There are now people along the corridor who are new since the decision to build the LRT line was made 3 years ago. They need to not only understand construction impacts, but more basically, what is the LRT and its potential benefits to the community.

Although the Metropolitan Council has not released a detailed construction phasing plan, it has developed a traffic diversion plan that gives some clues as to the phasing. He said University between Hamline and the city line will be broken down in six segments, 3 segments on either side of the street. The construction will be done in a two-thirds – two-thirds approach. They will take the southern two-thirds of the street and begin building the center area - where the train is going to be - as well as reconstructing the sidewalk and the street portion for east bound traffic. As the project begins to complete construction on the west end moving toward the east they will then start closing down west bound traffic on the north side of the street. The west bound traffic will be diverted to the south side of University Avenue and the center median will also be under construction (the second of the “two-thirds – two thirds” phasing). This is a very complex but fast moving reconstruction project. It is going to be difficult to track, for the property owners and the broader community. There will be extensive logistical coordination with property owners/tenants during construction; ensuring that every business and property owner has vehicular and pedestrian access to their building/residence/business.

The contractor is contractually obligated to limit construction in front of any particular property to 150 days, and hopefully under 90 days in many cases. In addition, the contractor must not exceed 15 days for sidewalk construction in front of any single property. During the construction of sidewalks there will be wooden crossings and boardwalks to allow people to get into the front doors of businesses. Property owners are to have uninterrupted pedestrian access to their buildings.

At the end of 2011 from Hamline west there will be new curb gutters, new sidewalks, and new street pavement all in its final form, in addition there will be landscaping. So in about ten or eleven months west of Hamline it will show how the streets will look, with the exception of the rail in the middle of the street. University from Hamline to the Capitol will be completed in 2012.

Commissioner Nelson asked if there were plans to maintain the alleys, improve lighting, or plow or remove snow?

Mr. Blakely said that Public Works on a one-time basis did remove some of the heavy snow this winter, but that it is not a precedent, and there is no identified source of funding to do that in the future.

Commissioner Porter expressed concerns about the amount of outreach for the business owners about the loss of parking and construction.

Mr. Blakely said that the Met Council outreach staff have done extensive outreach in person and by mail, but that business and property owners are just now focusing on what is happening in front of their property as construction is getting ready to start.

Allen Lovejoy, Public Works staff said that as the project moves forward the contractor will be talking to all businesses along the Avenue to ensure that the project staff fully understand what the accessibility needs are for each business, and endeavor to accommodate those needs.

All questions regarding construction should be directed to the Central Corridor Construction Hotline (651) 602-1404. In addition, there is a series of committees set up along the corridor that

will be meeting periodically during the construction process to evaluate the contractor, in terms of how are they dealing with constituent concerns. Those committees are made up of property owners along the corridor - so it is the people that are directly being impacted. There is a fund to pay bonuses to the contractor if they fulfill expectations of the community in terms of responsiveness to local construction concerns.

Commissioner Thao suggested that more parking was needed, temporary parking should be provided, and that a second round of funding from the Parking program might be a good idea.

Mr. Blakely said that there will be some temporary parking provided on the old Midway Chevrolet site at 1433 University, which the HRA owns and plans to develop into affordable housing. He added that City plans to discourage developing large new parking lots on University Avenue, and that a second round of awards from the Parking Program is currently not anticipated.

Commissioner Fernandez asked whether there was enough funding to improve all the alleys?

Mr. Blakely said that the \$350,000 available is not enough to do all the alleys, and that a process is being developed to prioritize where best to spend that money.

Mr. Blakely said there are two pots of funding, one is the Parking Program fund for parking improvements and the alley funding of \$350,000 is not enough to do the entire Central Corridor alleys north and south of University. They are in the process of prioritizing where those improvements should be made.

Commissioner Fernandez asked for an explanation of the non-signalized pedestrian crossings.

Mr. Lovejoy said that the blocks along University Avenue are about 600 feet long and the station platforms are about 300 feet long, so the primary way to get to the station platform will be at the signalized intersections. There are two problems if there is only one access to the platform. First, capacity to load/unload only at one end of the platform does not work well. Patrons will likely be bunched up at one end of the platform. Second, only exiting at the signalized intersection requires certain patrons to walk away from their destination to cross the street. And third is personal security: if you are on the platform and someone is blocking your path to get off, there may no safe way to get off the platform. So, the design of the platform access now includes the ability to enter/exit from the non-signalized end. There will be marked but not signalized pedestrian crosswalks. Since there are signals just 300 feet "upstream" there will be adequate breaks in traffic flow to allow for safe pedestrian crossings. The project also includes special lighting and other cues to let the motorist know that they are coming to a place that is a pedestrian precinct, and to beware.

Commissioner Connolly wanted to know whose two hundred million dollars (\$200,000,000) will have been spent before we know we are getting the rest when the full funding grant agreement is signed.

Mr. Lovejoy said that Ramsey County and Hennepin County have pledged a certain proportion of the overall project cost. The state allocated bonding funding as well. Those sources make up the majority of the 50% local share for capital. And they are confident that the full funding grant agreement will be signed sometime in April.

VII. Comprehensive Planning Committee

Chair Commers said they have had ongoing meetings about the Central Corridor rezoning process and amendments to the zoning code. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, February 15, 2011.

VIII. Neighborhood Planning Committee

Commissioner Kramer said that there is a scheduled meeting for Wednesday, February 9, 2011.

IX. Transportation Committee

Commissioner Spaulding announced the items on the agenda for the next Transportation Committee meeting on Monday, February 7, 2011.

X. Task Force Reports

None.

XI. Old Business

None.

XII. New Business

None.

XIII. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 10:20 a.m.

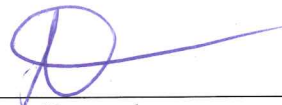
Recorded and prepared by
Sonja Butler, Planning Commission Secretary
Planning and Economic Development Department,
City of Saint Paul

Respectfully submitted,



Donna Drummond
Planning Director

Approved 2-18-11
(Date)



Anthony Fernandez
Secretary of the Planning Commission